DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 313 203 RC 017 340

AUTHOR Iannucilli, Mary V.
TITLE Education and the Native American.
PUB DATE Mar 87
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Historical Materials (060)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acculturation; *American Indian Education; American Indian History; American Indians; *Educational History; Elementary Secondary Education; *Federal Indian Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Native Americans

ABSTRACT

Traditionally, Native Americans educated their children through the oral transmission of beliefs and values. Christian missions dominated Indian education from the 16th to the 19th century and began the process of erasing Native American identity and culture. After the Civil War, control of 73 Indian agencies was assigned to 13 religious denominations, charged with teaching the "savages a better way of life" in preparation for assuming "the duties and privileges of citizenship." By 1900, the off-reservation boarding school had become the Federal Government's favored means of promoting Indian assimilation. A uniform course of study that ignored Native American cultural heritage was established in federal schools in 1916, and Congress made school attendance mandatory in all reservations and agencies in 1921. In 1928 a Senate investigation produced the Meriam Report, which recommended schooling within Indian communities and allocation of more money. John Collier, Indian Commissioner in the 1930s, encouraged the preservation of American Indian languages and culture, replaced boarding schools with reservation day schools, and hired the first Indian teachers in the federal system. During the 1940s, however, proposed changes in federal policy threatened to terminate the trust relationships that existed between the tribes and the U.S. Government. In 1944 resistance to termination led to the formation of the National Congress of American Indians and a new unity of spirit among Native Americans. The social consciousness of the 1960s provided money for a variety of programs, and several experimental Indian schools were begun. The last 15 years have seen the Indian people gradually changing the educational system, promoting a new emphasis on cultural awareness and sensitivity in the classroom. This paper includes 12 references. (SV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Mary Iannucilli

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED313203

RC017340

EDUCATION AND THE NATIVE AMERICAN

Submitted by: M.V. Iannucilli

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The education of the Native American begins as early as the sixteenth century with the story of Christian missionaries trying to "civilize" a race of people that was little understood, if at all.

For the purpose of this paper and since the topic is so broad, I will give a brief history of the development of education. It is essential to consider education from two perspectives: the process of education as lived by the Indian, and the "system" of education, as imposed by the federal government.

Education is a way to transmit and acquire knowledge and skills. The Native American used oral tradition to educate its people and the tribal elders carried out this responsibility with other "extended" family members. There was a whole social value system that was taught, which developed a strong sense of communal responsibility, social consciousness, and love for the land.

It was at the arrival of the white man that the education of the Native American drastically changed. Indian education suddenly became the task of the Church and the state and the Native American identity would soon become diminished or be denied altogether. "Two eras emerge: the period of missionary domination from the 16th to the 19th century, and

the period of federal government domination from the late 19th century until the mid-twentieth century."[1]

The teachings of the tribal elders stressed self-determination and self-reliance. It would appear that these two qualities transcend cultures and speak a universal language to all humankind. However, in 1774, the commissioners of Maryland and Virginia invited their Indian neighbors to attend William and Mary College. The Indians declined the offer and stated: "...But you who are wise must know that different nations have different conceptions of things, and you will, therefore, not take it amiss if our ideas of education happen not to be the same as yours..."[2]

The Christianization of the Indian, begun in the 16th century, continued to gain momentum. Mission schools and communities were created and the Bible was translated into many Native American languages. The Indian replaced the belief in the Great Spirit with Jehovah and began the process of giving up tribal myths, practices, heroes. In effect, the Indian spirit was broken. The identity of the Native American was disappearing. The rich oral traditions of these peoples were being replaced with "Greek myths and Judeo-Christian heroes."[3]

The mission schools, established by the various Christian churches, started the process of alienation and displacement of the Native American. Our own federal government completed

this process with an assimilation policy that began in the late 19th century. The government's goal was "the total absorption of Indian youth into the mainstream of American life."[4] Naturally, this process further weakened the cultural identity of the Native American.

After the Civil War, the United States policy toward the Indian began to change. The Indian "problem" had to be dealt with quickly. Under President Grant, a "Quaker" Peace Policy was produced which coerced tribes to live within the confines of the reservation assigned. The peace policy called for the Indians "to be taught the arts of agriculture, and such pursuits as are incident to civilization through the aid of the Christian organizations now engaged in this work, cooperating with the Federal Government... It is the further aim to establish Schools, to build Churches and organize Sabbath Schools, whereby these savages may be taught a better way of life and be made to understand and appreciate the comforts and benefits of a Christian civilization and thus be prepared ultimately to assume the duties and privileges of citizenship."[5]

It is clearly understood that the above statement smacks of imperialism. It was taken for granted that Church and State had one set of cultural standards to which the red man was expected to conform.

As a direct result of President Grant's Peace Policy, there were "thirteen religious denominations which exercised

control over 73 Indian agencies, with each church monopolizing evangelical activities in designated jurisdictions."[6]

All of this evangelism did not result in effective governance or administration. Indeed, it fostered interdenominational competition, but did not gain in Indian converts. Tribal separatism and ethnic consciousness continued to survive.

In 1887, however, Congress passed the General Allotment Act. This act divided the reservation lands and allowed each Indian 160 acres if he headed his family. It also offered American citizenship to the Indians who accepted these lands and agreed to live on their land away from other members of their tribe. Any of the land remaining was available for the white community to settle. Ultimately, this Act "threatened communal property, one of the basic foundations of Indian culture and cohesion."[7] So the hopes of government reformers to Americanize the Indian, were reflected in the agency schools that would soon be established.

The "off-reservation" boarding school was one of the most popular schools for young Native Americans. The youths were encouraged to reject tribal customs and adapt to the ways of the white man. Problems surfaced when the students returned home: all that they were taught could not be applied back on the reservation.[8] Interestingly enough, the deep spirituality of the Indian was the force that held the Indian

tribes together -- the elder tribal members preserved the integrity of Indianness. The agency schools could not change or convert totally every student enrolled. The spiritual system of the Native American could prevail.[9]

There is no doubt that the policy of assimilation was promoted through government schools. Schools were rapidly increasing at the end of the 19th century. The government even used abandoned military posts as schools for Indian children. How debilitating it must have been for the Indian children to be educated in military outposts!

The schools located in military posts were structured with militaristic rules, had very strict discipline, and mandatory attendance. In addition, the curriculum was inflexible and insensitive -- offering only industrial and vocational training. "in 1916 a uniform course of study in all federal schools which ignored the unique cultural heritage of the Native American was established."[10]

Throughout history, the various treaties and agreements made with the Indians tried to provide for compulsory attendance for a certain time each year with penalties assessed to parents for failure to comply with the suggested guidelines of attendance. Finally, since absenteeism was such a problem in Indian education, the Congress in 1921 "made the compulsory attendance law effective in all reservations and agencies."[11] This act, it was believed, greatly

increased attendance and filled the government schools.

The Mandatory Attendance Law in 1921 backfired on the federal government. The government policy makers began to realize that the federal Indian school system was overcrowded, most unsuitable to the Indian students enrolled in work and study programs, deficient in health and food services, and as alluded to previously, extremely rigid in discipline.

Even to the present day, the federal system of Indian education has not shown a concerted effort in trying to recognize and respect cultural differences in identity. The federal bureau of Indian Affairs "continues to be impervious to the needs of the Indian child. Even with condemnations of the boarding schools by educators, psychologists, physicians, and the Indian people, and after investigations and recommendations by private and government teams, very little long-term changes are evident."[12]

In 1928, the United States Senate called for a special "investigation of the federal Indian educational system. The investigation resulted in the Meriam Report. The report recommended that Indian children be kept in their own communities - this was in direct contradiction to the boarding school concept. The report also stressed that more humanitarian values should be shown to the native American and that more money should be allocated for Indian education.

Even though the report recommended changes, the federal government's position on assimilation did not change.

Substantial educational reform did not come until the 1930's. It was under the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier, that teachers of Indian students were told that cultural separateness must be reocgnized. Collier and other reformers worked constantly to improve curriculum, develop schools in the community, and improve the federal-state relations. "It was Collier who made the educational changes of the 1930's possible, for it was he who created the climate necessary for educational reform."[13]

During the administration of Collier as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the Wheeler-Howard Act of 1934 was passed. This allowed for the hiring of Indians as teachers for the first time in the federal Indian school system. It also allowed for tuition loans to be given to Indians at vocational trade schools.

Collier also closed many Indian government board schools and opened up day schools on the reservations. He was concerned about preserving the Indian language and began Indian cultural programs.

The native American suffered another set back in the early 1940's. Attitudes about the Indian began to change; again the government policy called for the "unilateral termination of the special historic and treaty-bound relationships between the United States and the Indian tribes."[14]

Though the struggle between the government and the Indians was always bitter and hard-fought, this policy left the Indian with almost nothing in land or services. The Indian people were forced to leave their homes and relocate in unfamiliar areas, many federal Indian schools were closed, and treaty agreements were considered worthless.

The days of progressive education and cultural regard for the identity of the native American was over. The termination policy sewed seeds of resistance and disruption and caused the first political union for the Indian, the National Congress of American Indians, to be organized in 1944.

A direct result of these Indian protests was a new unity and oneness of spirit of the native American. The social consciousness of the 60's gave new hope to the Indian. The poorer minorities were allocated monies for a variety of programs: Head Start, Outward Bound, Job Corps, Vista, and other community programs. During this time several experimental Indian schools were begun.

Some schools today, administered by Native Americans, are dealing effectively with the questions of Indian culture and heritage. "It is of utmost importance to utilize Native thinking and Native talent whenever Natives are being discussed in the classroom."[15] It is believed that Indian

culture and identity must be treated wholistically if the integrity of the heritage of the Native American is to be preserved and understood.

Over the centuries, it has always been the intention of the "White Man" to orient Native American children to the ways of the white world. Today's Indian schools are successful only if the teachers, curriculum content, and teaching methods, are directed toward the specific cultural experiences of the minority being taught.[16] It is essential that there be cultural sensitivity in the classroom. The last 15 years have seen the Indian people gradually changing the educational system. The philosophy of allowing the Indian to remain Indian, to perpetuate the Indian culture, and to educate for economic survival is not paternalistic. It is an awakening to and an appreciation for a culture and heritage different than the white man's. The superior-inferior attitude must disappear and a valid concentrated program of education must appear, "which will allow the Indian to survive in a white man's world and yet maintain his dignity and individuality as a member of a great and noble race."[17]

In conclusion, it is my opinion that one of the greatest educational needs of the Native American is to establish a parent-based early childhood education program for children at a very young age. This would strengthen the communal

bond that the Native American values so highly. If parents work with their children at a very young age, then very dramatic positive effects can result in the child's future.

It is imperative that the Indian parent and community cooperate in formulating the cultural, psychological, physical, intellectual, and language base upon which Indian schools must build for today and tomorrow.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Schooling of Native America, p. 4, Thomas Thompson, Editor, 1978.
2. Ibid., p. 8.
3. The White Man's Indian, Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., p. 168, 1978.
4. The Schooling of Native America, p. 5, Thomas Thompson, Editor, 1978.
5. The White Man's Indian, p. 169.
6. American Indians and Christian Missions, Henry W. Bowden, p. 192, 1981.
7. Ibidem, p. 194.
8. American Indians, William T. Hagan, 1979, p. 135, Ch. 5, (Acculturation Under Duress).
9. Now That The Buffalo's Gone, Alvin Josephy, 1982, P. 78, Ch. 3, "Give The Papoose A Chance."
10. The Schooling of Native America, p. 5, Thomas Thompson, Editor, 1978.
11. A Study Of The Role Of The Federal Government In The Education Of The American Indian, Theodore Fischbacher, 1967, P. 130.
12. Sleeping Giant, P. 10, William E. Coffer, 1979.
13. Education And The American Indian, P. 40, Margaret Szasz, 1977.
14. The Schooling Of Native America, P. 6, Thomas Thompson, Editor, 1978.
15. Defeathering The Indian, P. 10, Emma LaRoque, 1975.
16. The Invisible Culture, P. 130-134, Susan Philips, 1983.
17. Sleeping Giants, Preface, P. 111, William E. Coffer, 1979.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Berkhofer, Robert F., The White Man's Indian, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1978.

Bowden, Henry W., American Indians and Christian Missions, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Coffer, William E., Sleeping Giants, Washington, D.C., University Press of America, Inc., 1979.

Fischbacher, Theodore, A Study Of The Role Of The Federal Government In The Education Of The American Indian, San Francisco, R and E Research Associates, 1974.

Hagan, William T., American Indians, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Josephy, Alvin M., Now That The Buffalo's Gone, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1982.

LaRogue, Emma, Defeathering The Indian, Canada, The Book Society of Canada Limited, 1975.

McGaa, Ed, "America Can Learn From Indian Values," American Values, Opposing Viewpoints, St. Paul, Minnesota, Greenhaven Press, 1984.

Philips, Susan U., The Invisible Culture, New York, Longman, Inc., 1983.

Prucha, Francis P., American Indian Policy In Crisis, Norman, Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 1976.

Szasz, Margaret C., Education And The American Indian, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1977.

Thompson, Thomas, The Schooling Of Native America, Washington, D.C., American Association of Colleges For Teacher Education, 1978.